

Newark citizens attend Council meetings for various reasons, one of which is to get some idea of how the City's business is carried on. But since the Council is not the operative and administrative part of government, we must depend on articles in the daily newspaper, from which we get some knowledge of the day-to-day workings of our government. From this source we learned some time ago that the Office of Real Property did not know the identity of all city-owned real estate, and that there was some difficulty in rent collection from tenants in some of these properties. We also know, by observation, that buildings taken over by the City are immediately vandalized before they are properly secured and boarded up. The latest example is the Krueger Mansion, vandalized and stripped of priceless irreplaceable items, reduced in significance as a National Landmark.

But we were not prepared to learn from a recent newspaper article that irregularities in the Office of Real Property had come to the attention of the Federal Government, with resultant investigation by the FBI. It is beside the point, and may be relatively unimportant, whether any malfeasance or criminality is involved. What is important is that there is already indisputable evidence of complete failure of performance at the supervisory and administrative levels.

This situation has not arisen suddenly. It did not occur overnight, over the week-end, over the month, or over the year. I refuse to believe that responsible officials: the head of the Office of Real Property, the Business Administrator and his predecessors, the Mayor, and this Council had no knowledge whatsoever of conditions in this department. But everyone closed their eyes, just business as usual, and consequently the citizens of Newark suffer the humiliation of an FBI survey of the workings of a government unit of their City. If nothing else, the press story shows some of the results of entrenched incompetence at the supervisory and administrative levels. These are harsh words but at some point it is the duty of all of us to approach and admit reality.

A member of this Council, according to the press, has recommended that the functions of the Office of Real Property be transferred to a private real estate management firm. I do not know if he was serious in making this proposal. But I am serious in endorsing it; as serious as I was when, two years ago, I recommended that the Newark Housing Authority be abolished and administration of its properties turned over to a private real estate management firm. I cannot estimate comparative costs, but in both instances, we would have a better chance of getting what we pay for.

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